

Time Management

An Essential Student Skill

Managing time may be one of the most important, though a seldom taught, skill students learn. Too important to be left to chance development, effective time management skills must regularly be taught as part of the curriculum.

Teachers and parents influence students' attitudes toward time usage, especially during the elementary years. Waiting two weeks to grade test papers or habitually arriving late for class will not help change student procrastination or tardiness. Be a positive model by being organized, being punctual, and by setting and following goals.

Simply telling students to "get organized" and failing to show them *how* is of little value. The skills of time management - planning, goal setting, speed-reading, filing, study skills, and setting priorities - must be intentionally taught.

Metacognition on Student Time

Introduce the idea of time usage by assigning the class to brainstorm time-related proverbs and quotations. Facilitate discussion on the meanings of each item and whether students believe it to be true. Samples include:

- "Time heals all wounds."
- "Haste makes waste."
- "How time flies when you're having fun."
- "To spend your time is to spend your life."
- "Time is money."

Help students recognize how they spend their time. Students should predict how they spend their time on school, homework, the telephone, sleeping, eating, playing, and home chores. Each person's prediction must total 24 hours.

Assign students to keep a time log for one week noting how they spend their time in 15 minute blocks. Merely monitoring and recording how their time is spent affects the behavior of many individuals. Students reflect on their time logs with questions such as:

- What are the different steps that will help you reach your goal?
- What resources will you need to succeed? How much money?
- How much time will it take?
- Do you need anyone's help? How can you get it? From whom?
- What things may get in the way of your reaching that goal?
- Can you do anything about any of those obstacles? What?
- What will happen if you don't succeed? Do you have a plan B?

(Source: *The Heart of Teaching Newsletter*; *Performance Learning Systems, Inc.*)

Time Off-Task

What are students doing when they are off-task? Research by Bob Reed at Bowling Green State University revealed that the answer varies according to grade level. Each activity is expressed as a percentage of class time it consumes.

Elementary:

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| 3.9% waiting for class to begin | 3.6% daydreaming |
| 3.8% socializing | 3.2% transitions |

Junior High/Middle School:

| | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|
| 9.6% daydreaming | 3.2% waiting for class to begin |
| 7.3% socializing | 2.8% waiting for class to end |

High School:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 6.0% socializing | 5.0% waiting for class to begin |
| 5.3% waiting for class to end | 4.9% daydreaming |

(Source: Bob Reed, Time Off -Task, Bowling Green State University. Unpublished study)

Improving Time On-Task

Managing Transitions

Some transition time is essential as classes move from one activity to another. Successful teachers use the following strategies to minimize the amount stolen from valuable learning time.

- **Be prepared:** Have all materials ready for quick distribution. Anticipate the steps necessary for each activity.
- **Cue students** that a new activity is coming up. A two-minute warning signal allows students to conclude their current activities.
- **Train student aides** to assist in classroom activities, such as collecting and distributing materials, taking attendance or lunch count, and greeting visitors.
- **Create routines** so students know exactly how to efficiently accomplish transitions.
- **Teach consistent structures** for efficiently handling all transitions. Don't assume they know what to do.
- **Be clear and concise** in giving directions. Written instructions or model projects often help. Break directions into easy-to-follow steps.
- **Begin class immediately:** Design activities to engage students as soon as they enter the room.
- **Organize** the classroom to minimize interruptions, distractions, and bottlenecks. Arrange seating to facilitate monitoring all students.
- **Teach students good work habits:** Record assignments, bring necessary supplies, and keep a subject notebook.

(Source: *How to Increase Learning Time*, edited by Steve Engel, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory)